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# Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

**Summary record of the 14th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 21 October 2004, at 3 p.m.

*Chairman*: Mr. Calderón (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Ecuador)
*Later*: Mr. Swe (Chairman) ..... (Myanmar)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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*In the absence of Mr. Swe (Myanmar), Mr. Calderón (Ecuador), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.*

**Agenda item 78: Questions relating to information** (*continued*) (A/59/21 and A/59/221 and Corr.1)

**Agenda item 109: Programme planning** (*continued*) (A/59/6 (Programme 23: Public information) and A/59/16, chap. II, sect. C, prog. 23)

*Action on draft proposals contained in the report of the Committee on Information* (A/59/21)

1. **Ms. Baaziz** (Algeria) said that, although information and communication technology (ICT) was a useful tool for human development and had helped bring the peoples of the world closer together, it had also created inequalities. The United Nations must ensure that all countries had equal access to the benefits of ICT in order to close the digital divide between the developed and developing countries. The Department of Public Information (DPI) should concentrate on communication strategies which brought the Organization closer to the people of the world and contributed to its major goals, in particular with regard to poverty, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, dialogue between civilizations and cultures and the needs of the African countries.

2. The United Nations web site was a great success, and she welcomed progress made in the use of all official languages; the quality of information and service provided by the News Centre continued to improve. It was essential all six official languages should receive equal treatment in the Organization's web services as well as with regard to documentation. She therefore welcomed the increased use of all six languages in United Nations radio broadcasts, given that radio was the most effective means of communication in isolated areas and in the developing countries in particular.

3. The Organization's decolonization activities were important for the realization of the goals of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. She welcomed the efforts exerted by the Department in that regard and expressed the hope that they would help the last of the colonial peoples to exercise their right to self-determination.

4. Turning to the issue of rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres, she said that it was too early to follow up the creation of the Western European hub with the establishment of other regional information centres. The United Nations information centres were a valuable resource in the developing countries, which lacked technological resources. Any regrouping of such centres must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the host countries concerned.

5. **Mr. Awad** (Egypt) said that his delegation commended DPI for undertaking reforms with a view to confronting current challenges. Having participated in the drafting of the resolutions before the Committee, his delegation believed that information policy should be adapted to reflect the evolving needs of Member States. Such a policy must promote the dissemination of news about the United Nations throughout the world, with emphasis on multilingualism and access in all six official languages, as well as on the promotion of libraries and information centres, so as to strengthen dialogue between cultures and civilizations. With a view to consolidating the peace process, the Department should continue its activities to increase public awareness with regard to peace and stability in the Middle East; it should offer ample, objective messages that would expose the realities on the ground and support the aspirations of Arab peoples living under the yoke of foreign occupation. The financial resources available to the Department were far from sufficient to fund a comprehensive information policy: that problem must be solved. The principles of the Millennium Declaration should be incorporated into the work programme of the Department.

6. The establishment of regional United Nations information centres was a source of discord between the developing and developed countries. In considering the two draft resolutions, it was essential for delegations to attempt to narrow those differences and to agree on a process for the regionalization of information centres that was in keeping with the mandates of the General Assembly. The first phase, which had involved the creation of a regional centre in Western Europe, was now complete, and the next phase must begin. It should entail devoting the resources released by closing down nine European centres to information activities in the developing countries.

7. **Mr. Nur Jazlan Mohamed** (Malaysia) said he hoped that the Department's new organizational

structure and mission would enhance its abilities to inform the world of the diverse functions of the United Nations in order to restore public confidence in and support for the Organization. Despite considerable financial and staffing restraints, the Department had made a good start in encouraging the development of an information culture around the world. For the many people who lacked food, water, decent shelter, education and health care, the Internet was a distant dream. Malaysia therefore believed that measures should and could be taken to develop partnerships between developed and developing countries in research, technology transfer, and the manufacturing and marketing of information technology products and services, with a view to bridging the digital divide.

8. Malaysia had implemented a rural Internet programme, to provide infrastructure, services and opportunities to rural areas, including rural Internet centres and a rural portal. In particular, it had successfully established a programme of mobile Internet units to reach less privileged areas and a nationwide Internet school programme. It welcomed the dissemination of reports on the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council held in June 2004, and the coverage given to the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit-Developing Countries, held in Almaty in August 2003, which had highlighted the challenges faced by landlocked developing countries. It was proud to have contributed to the Department's activities to promote the International Year of Fresh Water, by providing media coverage on progress made in achieving the water target.

9. Although his delegation welcomed the range of activities that the Department had undertaken to enhance United Nations activities in support of sustainable development in Africa, it believed that a long-term and action-oriented international strategy was necessary to resolve the problems there. It congratulated the Department on the success of the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. DPI should continue to play an important role in informing the public of the tragic suffering of the Palestinian people and was to be commended for providing training programmes to members of the Palestinian communication media.

10. His delegation fully subscribed to the views expressed by the Group of 77 and China with respect to the restructuring of information centres, and was encouraged by cooperation between the Department and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in rationalizing the information centre network. It believed that a balanced and equitable use of the six official languages, especially on the web site, was essential, and welcomed the Department's partnership with the academic community throughout the world in translating materials for that purpose. Finally, he said that Malaysia was confident that the newly reformed Department would become a more effective vehicle for communication between the United Nations and the world.

11. **Mr. Nepal** (Nepal) noted with appreciation that the Department had been contributing immensely to the field of communications, despite resource constraints, and had played a laudable role at the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in 2003. The Department had a special role in improving access to information in developing countries, especially the least developed among them, which were utterly lacking in modern communication means; the Department should therefore use the radio and print media in reaching out to them. It should also produce more language-specific programmes for achieving the targeted objectives.

12. United Nations information centres in resource-strapped countries deserved to be strengthened in order to better serve the people who most needed them. His delegation agreed with many others that centres in developing countries should not be merged. It strongly urged the strengthening of the Kathmandu Information Centre, which needed resources in order to carry out training in the use of United Nations services for personnel from the communication media, non-governmental organizations, academia and libraries and for interested individuals. In that regard, it welcomed the Department's efforts to undertake a review of United Nations libraries. However, since libraries in the developing world were not yet ready to receive electronic deposits, the Department should continue to provide them with hard copies. Workshops, such as the one held in Pretoria in the summer of 2003 should be conducted in other regions, on a rotational, or perhaps regular basis, to familiarize librarians and other personnel with the United Nations documentation system.

13. **Mr. Mansour** (Yemen) said that his delegation commended the Department for the development of library and information networks and for its effort to

reach a worldwide public and foster dialogue between cultures. It congratulated the Under-Secretary-General on the progress achieved by the Department, in particular the establishment of contacts with the Arab world, and it welcomed the endeavours to make the web site accessible in all six official languages and to enhance information services for developing countries.

14. **Mr. Sinaga** (Indonesia), endorsing the organization of the work of DPI into four main subprogrammes, said that, insofar as the United Nations information centres were concerned, any restructuring of the network should be on a case-by-case basis and should not be detrimental to the interests of the developing countries, where the presence of information centres often served as a catalyst to development. Indonesia was concerned over the proposed regionalization of the information centres, especially because it was too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the first such experiment, the Western European hub, and because there was a gap between Europe and the other regions, in terms of ICT and infrastructure. The Organization needed to have a comprehensive picture before embarking on the next stage of regionalization. A different cause for concern was that certain core functions of the information centres could not be carried out because of lack of funding.

15. His delegation appreciated the improved delivery of services by DPI. The United Nations web site had become the prime tool for reaching target audiences in the media, non-governmental organizations, academia and the general public, including persons with disabilities. There were limitations, however, in terms of both language and technology, making the news provided inaccessible to some developing societies. It was critical to ensure the ability of all peoples to communicate and also to guarantee a diversity of sources of information and free access to information. The United Nations must redouble its efforts to bridge the communication, information and digital divide so that all could reap the benefits of globalization.

16. **Mr. Zhang** Yishan (China) welcomed the spirit of rigorous reform and innovation shown by DPI in recent years and said that his delegation attached great importance to the work of the Committee on Information, whose role in formulating and reviewing the Organization's public information policies should be strengthened.

17. As the United Nations approached its sixtieth anniversary, it became increasingly important to promote the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations and multilateralism. Despite the challenges and difficulties encountered, the cause of maintaining world peace and stability and promoting the common development of mankind could not be separated from multilateralism and a powerful United Nations. The international reference in the field of international relations was the Charter of the United Nations, which enshrined principles such as respect for State sovereignty and non-interference, peaceful settlement of disputes and strengthening of international cooperation. The sixtieth anniversary of the Organization would provide an opportune moment to mobilize the peoples of the world to promote the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and call on countries to reaffirm their commitments to the Organization and to multilateralism.

18. The Organization must focus on development and guiding public opinion, avoiding the tendency within the Organization itself and in the media and public opinion to highlight political rather than economic issues. Violence and disaster, after all, made better headlines than the fight against poverty, hunger or environmental degradation. He therefore appreciated the efforts of DPI to publicize issues such as HIV/AIDS, the digital divide, the needs of African countries and the Millennium Development Goals. The Department and Member States must promote the Goals to the general public in a user-friendly manner and encourage the media to focus on the well-being of the many developing countries, thereby reinvigorating the implementation process.

19. The Organization must also continue to promote dialogue between civilizations and language parity. His delegation supported the Department of Public Information in its efforts to use print, radio, television and the Internet to present accurate and balanced information on the United Nations system and to advocate dialogue, tolerance and coexistence among civilizations. That work was of real significance in the current world situation. The multilingual capacity of the United Nations web site and broadcasts should be reinforced and he noted that the Chinese web site had recently registered the highest growth in use. Adequate financial and human resources must be made available so that all official languages were on a truly equal footing. As for the rationalization of the network of

United Nations information centres, he advocated a step-by-step approach based on close consultations with the Member States concerned and taking into account the ICT gap between developed and developing countries.

20. His delegation had always supported the Organization's information programmes and had progressively expanded its cooperation with the Organization in that regard. There were also increased contacts between United Nations radio and television and Chinese media. His Government would continue to support the United Nations in its information work and strive to establish a just international information and communication order, in pursuit of the purposes and objectives of the United Nations.

21. **Mr. López** (Cuba) said that the communication and information divide between developed and developing countries was growing daily, despite efforts to bring technological advances to all parts of the world. Indeed, the greater the technological advance, the greater the divide. While the developed world was enjoying the Internet boom, the countries of the South were held back by persisting poverty, disease and conflicts. Building on the World Summit on the Information Society, it was necessary to provide secure funding to ensure the access of the developing countries to information technology.

22. There was a similar imbalance in the dissemination of information. The information emanating from the developed world distorted or disregarded news and developments in the developing world, and even used news as a political distraction. A new world information and communication order was even more necessary than before. The United Nations information centres should take the lead in disseminating fair and balanced news.

23. There could not be a single rationalization model suitable for all the United Nations information centres because of significant regional differences in communication capability. The use of the radio, for instance, was essential in the countries of the South, where many people were still illiterate. The printed press was also important. The experience of the Regional Centre in Western Europe was not automatically applicable.

24. His delegation endorsed the strategy of publicizing the crucial work and decisions of the General Assembly, the most universal and representative body in the United Nations. It was imperative to inform the world about the impact it was having.

25. Once again, his delegation had to speak out in the Committee about the aggression the United States was committing against Cuba over radio and television. More than 2,000 hours of radio and television broadcasting of anything but balanced and objective programming were currently being aimed at Cuba each week. Seventeen of the stations were run by organizations linked to known terrorists based and operating in United States territory with the full consent of the Government, which actually owned two of the stations and allocated $35 million annually to them. Such broadcasts infringed Cuba's sovereignty and flagrantly violated International Telecommunication Union regulations. The illegal anti-Cuban broadcasting financed and encouraged by the United States painted a false picture of the situation in the country, encouraged illegal immigration fraught with danger, incited to civil disobedience, violence and terrorism in defiance of the rule of law. Various United Nations resolutions had condemned the exploitation of information for criminal or terrorist purposes, and it was illegal to use information to subvert the domestic order of another country. Still, the United States persisted, and it had refined the electronic techniques used in its obsessive radio assault. Fortunately, however, Cuban technicians had used their ingenuity to jam the television transmission and a good proportion of the radio broadcasts. Above all, the United States Administration had come up against determined opposition to that type of aggression by the entire Cuban people, who had the sovereign right to choose the type of information it wished to receive.

26. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that freedom of expression was one of the linchpins of the democratic approach and was a basic human right of all people. Bahrain, believing in the freedom and equality of the individual, guaranteed freedom of expression and freedom of the press, allowing every citizen to express opinions by any means. It was indispensable that societies should learn about issues of concern to them through freedom of research, publications and the press, within the limits of the law. By drawing attention to important issues on World Press Freedom Day and featuring development issues and sustainable development achievements, the Department was able to communicate the activities and concerns of the

international community to the public, explaining the role of the United Nations and the impact it had.

27. If information was to serve its purpose, the digital divide must be bridged by harnessing the huge advances in ICT, as indicated in the Millennium Declaration, and earlier in General Assembly resolution 34/182, which urged universal access to ICT and a new information and communication order guaranteeing fairness of information, wider dissemination and greater balance. In the meantime, the best approach was for the international community to work concertedly to develop information and communication infrastructures, capacities and human resources in the developing countries, many of which lacked the modern sophisticated technology which was so much more effective than conventional means in ensuring a free flow of information.

28. The regionalization of United Nations information centres into hubs would not be the best way to bring the benefits of information to the target audiences of the centres. Hopes in developing countries were pinned on the centres to motivate their people and raise their awareness. The information centres were effective sources of knowledge and must be continually revitalized and provided with the informational materials needed. DPI should not resign itself to closing centres or merging them unless the host country was in agreement.

29. DPI deserved support in its work. It should continue to publicize the themes mandated by the General Assembly, particularly the question of Palestine.

30. **Ms. Mujuma** (United Republic of Tanzania), welcomed the progress made in the restructuring of DPI, which should remain a priority, and said that her Government recognized the importance of rationalizing the network of United Nations information centres while at the same time strengthening the United Nations information system in the developing countries. It had appreciated the assurance that the Member States concerned would always be consulted on a case-by-case basis. She assured the Department of her Government's full cooperation during consultations on the information centre in her country.

31. It was heartening to note that the Department had recognized the discrepancy between what people should know and what many media covering the work of the United Nations had deliberately chosen to disseminate. Her delegation urged the Department to encourage the media it collaborated with to cover the overlooked issues that affected so many of the world's people, such as poverty, hunger, disease and environmental degradation. Going beyond its "Ten Stories" project, the Department should instil a public conscience and elicit political action and a collective response. It might also focus from time to time on topical themes drawn from the United Nations agenda, in order to educate the public about the work of the Organization and get the citizens of the world actively involved in it.

32. The Department was to be commended for its creative use of new developments in information technology. As democratic reforms were consolidated in many countries, the Department should use every opportunity to work with their newly free media. Its outreach activities would benefit from partnerships with credible local media and in the process costs would probably be reduced. Similarly, the Department should work closely with other parts of civil society, especially youth organizations, which had the potential to be the most enthusiastic constituencies for the United Nations in Member States.

33. While it was encouraging to see that the Department itself was moving in the right direction, she feared that the General Assembly's decision to reduce the operational budget for United Nations information centres would affect the Department's ability to fulfil its mandate.

34. **Mr. Adjagba** (Togo) expressed his delegation's support for the revitalization of the Department of Information. A communication strategy should be aimed not only at reaching a wider public but also at helping to realize the goals and objectives set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the medium-term plan, including poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, dialogue between civilizations and cultures, sustainable development and the specific needs of African countries. His delegation urged the Department to continue giving priority to issues of special interest to developing countries.

35. Stressing the imperative necessity of maintaining the United Nations information centres in developing countries, he said that the information centre based in Togo also serviced Benin and served as a databank for many university students preparing their senior papers. The information centre in Lomé also received many

requests from elementary and high schools for information on United Nations topics, and its library was used frequently by scholars from both Benin and Togo.

36. As information and the press were inextricably linked, his delegation commended the Department for its observance of World Press Freedom Day in May and for pursuing its work in that area at a time when freedom of the press remained at risk. In that connection, he said that Togo, aware of the importance of information to the democratic process and the rule of law, had recently introduced a new press code. One of the most liberal in Africa, the Togolese Press and Communication Code gave journalists complete freedom of expression without their having to seek authorization. As a result, the Togolese press was one of the most flourishing and active. A small country of nearly 5 million inhabitants, Togo had nearly 200 newspapers, 40 of which were published on a regular basis. Its nearly 60 radio stations and 7 television stations broadcast their programmes freely, and there was no censorship of subject matter. Moreover local correspondents of the major international radio networks and press agencies in Togo were able to carry out their work without any constraints, even when their coverage of national current events was biased.

37. In conclusion, his delegation welcomed the operation of the United Nations News Centre in all six official languages and the improvements already introduced in DPI.

38. **Mr. Martins** (Angola) hailed the significant progress made by DPI in reaching out to the people of the world, including through its web site, which should be developed even further. It also commended the Department for making the United Nations News Centre available in the six official languages and pledged to give its continued support to public information activities.

39. Resource constraints hampered the efforts of developing countries to maintain broad, democratic and balanced information services. In the polarization between the connected and the isolated, the developing countries were cut off from the latest ICT. His delegation urged DPI to assist developing countries in building their technology systems. In that connection, it looked forward to the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Tunis in November 2005.

40. Angola supported the decision by DPI to inform the general public about the United Nations peacekeeping activities. At the national level, Angola was making every effort to mobilize all its available resources to develop its ICT in line with the goals and objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration. It urged the Department to promote priority development issues, such as poverty eradication, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS control, dialogue among civilizations and cultures and the prevention and combat of terrorism.

41. His delegation attached great importance to the role of the United Nations information centres in developing countries. The draft resolution the Committee was about to adopt referred once again to the offer made by his Government — and discussed during the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Information — to host an information centre that would serve the needs of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, in particular the African Portuguese-speaking countries.

42. Freedom of expression was a pillar of all democratic societies, and yet too many journalists still faced tremendous challenges in carrying out their work. Particularly with the advent of peace in Angola two years earlier, the number of newspapers, radios and other means of communication had proliferated and new press legislation was currently being finalized. Despite that improvement, however, much remained to be done. His Government would continue to strive to expand access to information and guarantee freedom of expression to the Angolan population.

43. **Mr. da Costa Moniz** (Cape Verde) expressed his full support for the statement made by the representative of Angola and said that the widening ICT gap between the developed and developing worlds was cause for concern. In many developing countries the traditional media, such as radio, continued to play an important role owing to the lack of the infrastructure and resources necessary to benefit from ICT.

44. He expressed appreciation for the work of the Portuguese language unit of the United Nations Radio, which not only broadcast in Portuguese, but also ran the Portuguese web page, providing information about the Organization's activities to the 250 million citizens of the Portuguese-speaking countries. It was important that Portuguese-language services should be

maintained and strengthened, and he welcomed the generous offer by the Government of Angola to host the regional information centre for the African Portuguese-speaking countries, including the construction of a building to accommodate the centre.

45. His delegation continued to support the ongoing process of reforms aimed at increasing the efficiency and improving the quality and flow of United Nations public information and communication activities. Those efforts would contribute to reducing the information divide between developed and developing countries.

46. *Mr. Swe (Myanmar), Chairman, took the Chair.*

47. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), replying to questions by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Arab Emirates, said that the Department was promoting dialogue between civilizations through its "Unlearning Intolerance" series. The next seminar in the series, "Confronting Islamaphobia: education for tolerance and understanding" was scheduled for 7 December. In addition, the United Nations information centres in Harare. Moscow and Sydney were organizing special local-level events on the theme of the dialogue.

48. Rationalization of the United Nations information centres was intended to enhance their effectiveness notwithstanding severe, and sometimes crippling, budgetary constraints. The plain fact was that the General Assembly had created a large number of information centres and then deprived them of the funding they needed. Regional hubs, however, would be unable to carry out their work without the proper funding. He would do his best to manage those contradictions and to allocate the limited resources available to his Department in the most effective manner. He had already indicated his intention to submit a comprehensive review of the performance of the regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels to the Committee on Information in 2005.

49. He was pleased that so many delegations attached importance to the United Nations information centres as the voice of the United Nations worldwide and was grateful for the financial and other support they provided. In particular, he expressed appreciation to the Government of Japan for increasing its annual contribution to the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo by 40 per cent, to the Government of Kuwait for its generous support in building a United Nations House and to the Government of Angola for its offer of free premises for a hub to serve the Portuguese-speaking community.

50. He had taken note of the continuing concern of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) at the outposting of one information officer in Kingston to support information outreach to audiences in that part of the Caribbean. The issue would be addressed in the context of the rationalization of the United Nations information centre network in the region and through bilateral discussions.

51. As for bridging the digital divide, he said that, while DPI was not an operational agency mandated to assist developing countries with ICT, it was actively promoting and supporting the World Summit on the Information Society. Through a task force created under the United Nations Communications Group, the Department was working closely with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Information and Communication Technology Task Force to improve access to ICT for development. In the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, the Department had been very active in helping ITU to obtain significant media coverage for the event. He wished to assure the representatives of the United States of America, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Trinidad and Tobago (on behalf of CARICOM) that the Department would remain very actively involved in the second phase of the Summit in Tunis as well and would be preparing another comprehensive information strategy to that end.

52. The Department was fully committed to keeping the international spotlight on Africa. It devoted at least 20 per cent of its activities in any given month to African issues. In addition, its Africa Section was working hard to ensure that articles on African issues appeared in major newspapers, not only in Africa but also in Asia and Europe. It would also be giving visibility to the Asia-Africa Trade and Investment Conference of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), to be held in November.

53. He wished to assure the representatives of Bangladesh and Ukraine that the Department had significantly increased its cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to which it

had submitted a draft communication strategy on addressing the so-called "information gap". It had also worked closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop specific strategies in, for example, Sierra Leone. The Department was also working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on a system-wide strategy for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. It had offered two training workshops in Italy and Switzerland in October, and its communication strategy on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, developed during a workshop in Dakar in 2003, had been incorporated in a pending policy document for use by 15 United Nations agencies and departments.

54. He was pleased that a number of speakers, including the representatives of Myanmar, the Netherlands and the United States, had endorsed the strategy to revitalize the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Under the restructuring plan, the processing aspects of the Library's work would be streamlined, within the framework of the recommendations made in the recent report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, with a view to assisting the Secretariat and supporting the United Nations information centres more effectively. The Library would intensify its work on the Official Document System (ODS) and improve its web site and training events. At the same time, it would explore alternative methods of providing information, including the use of CD-ROMs to make documents and information more easily accessible to depository libraries and the world at large. A recent Department workshop for depository libraries held in Africa had demonstrated the need for access to electronic information as well as the continuing need for a selection of printed materials while online infrastructure was set up.

55. In response to the queries by the representatives of the United Arab Emirates and the Syrian Arab Republic, he said that the Department was fully committed to promoting the rights of the Palestinian people. The annual training programme for Palestinian media practitioners, which was in its ninth year, now included a week-long session in Geneva at the headquarters of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The 2004 session of the training programme was scheduled to begin the following week; 10 Palestinian journalists had been invited to participate. Moreover, the Department's annual media seminar had been revamped and now served as an annual forum for policy makers, experts and media professionals from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, as well as from other parts of the world. The Department's 2004 Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalists' Fellowship Programme was an annual training programme for journalists from developing countries, including journalists from Iraq and several other Muslim countries. The Department had also significantly expanded its outreach services to the media in the Middle East and other Arab regions.

56. Aware of the continuing importance of traditional means of communication, especially radio, in the developing world, the Department was working vigorously to establish new partnerships with local, provincial, national and regional broadcasters around the world. In the past six months it had increased those partnerships to 160, including 12 new ones, the majority of them in developing countries. The feedback from its radio partners had been very positive. Earlier in the year, he had received a letter from the Director of Journalism at Radio Bandeirantes de São Paulo, (Brazil), expressing gratitude for the relationship between his network, comprising 60 broadcast stations, and the Portuguese-language unit of United Nations Radio. The Department had also heard from the Voice of America, Radio France Internationale and Deutsche Welle and from the United Nations Office in Belarus on its broadcast of the Organization's thousandth Russian-language programme. The United Nations Day concert on 25 October would be broadcast live to the people of China over Radio Beijing and syndicated to 21 stations in China covering a population of 400 million. Recently, he had sent a recorded message to Radio Beijing for the launching of its English channel in preparation for the 2008 Olympics. Finally, in June, United Nations Radio had launched a new weekly programme entitled "UN and Africa" which provided coverage of current-affairs-related stories on the work of the United Nations in Africa.

57. Making ODS accessible to the public in all six official languages did much to enhance multilingualism in the Department's activities. In response to the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates, he said that every effort was being made to guarantee the dissemination of information products in Arabic, including over the radio, on video and on the web site, and that numerous publications were already available in Arabic. The Department could not assume the heavy cost of

translation and interpretation of all its daily press releases into Arabic without cutting back on other activities mandated by the General Assembly; however, it had worked closely with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in the past year to ensure that Arabic versions of major statements by the Secretary-General and other eminent personalities were distributed to the Arab media. In response to the question by the representative of Morocco, he said that every effort was being made to ensure coordination of the two working languages, French and English, in meeting coverage.

58. Resources were at the heart of the Department's efforts to achieve genuine multilingualism. In response to the statement by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, he said that the Department was striving to redeploy more posts to that end but that, in the absence of increased resources or clear guidelines by Member States on which activities to eliminate in order to focus on parity, progress was slow, even with the many innovations to the web, including online and bidirectional scripts. Replying to the representative of the Republic of Korea, he announced that guided tours at Headquarters were given in Korean and a number of other non-official languages, including German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Swedish, Hindi and several African languages. Through partnerships with national and regional broadcasters, United Nations Radio and Television were strengthening their programming in non-official languages. He looked forward to discussions on the proposals by the representatives of the Republic of Korea and the United States to sacrifice absolute parity in favour of allocating more resources to the most heavily visited sites. Lastly, the praise by the representative of the Russian Federation of the Department's partnerships, including its NGO section, were heartening. The primary task of its Outreach Division was to foster such partnerships while conserving scarce budgetary resources. That would be particularly important in the lead-up to the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations.

59. **The Chairman** thanked the Under-Secretary-General for his informative statement. The number of speakers on the agenda item testified to the Committee's interest in the excellent work of the Under-Secretary-General and his team.

60. **Mr. Marsh** (United States of America), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, referred to the statement made by the representative of Cuba and said that the purpose of the Committee was to deal with the issue of information, not to disseminate misinformation. His Government took very seriously its obligations as a member of ITU, including the avoidance of harmful interference with the services of other nations. It was regrettable, however, that for 45 years the Cuban people had been denied their fundamental rights — to choose their representatives, to express their opinions freely without fear of reprisal and to meet and organize freely — by a system of agents and informers whose purpose was to suppress dissent and impose an ideology of conformity.

61. In March 2003 the Castro regime had cracked down on its peaceful opposition for exercising the right to freedom of expression and opinion as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; 75 individuals had been convicted by kangaroo courts and sentenced to an average of 20 years imprisonment simply for crimes such as writing for foreign web sites, organizing independent libraries, and collecting signatures for a petition calling for a referendum on basic rights. Those individuals — teachers, economists, medical doctors and human rights workers, some of whom were elderly or ill — had already spent some 19 months in prison in what had been described by a personal representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as very difficult conditions.

62. The Castro government so feared outside contacts with ordinary people that it had recently expelled three Europeans, members of their respective countries' parliaments, simply for wishing to meet with the peaceful and democratic opposition. That was the latest example of the Castro government's obsession with denying peaceful and freedom-loving Cubans access to the outside world. The Castro government's continued opposition to TV and Radio Martí and its imprisonment of prisoners of conscience, such as the poet Raúl Rivero Castañeda, who in 2004 had been awarded the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Press Freedom Prize, constituted further proof of the Cuban Government's fear of the consequences if Cubans were allowed access to uncensored information from the rest of the world, a right to which all people were entitled. Not only did the Castro regime deny the people their human rights and fundamental freedoms, but it also

betrayed them politically, failed them economically and wronged them by its unrelenting injustice.

63. **Mr. Kanafi** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, noted that a small number of delegations had called on DPI to highlight the suffering of the Palestinians. He recalled that a special information programme on the question of Palestine already existed. The activities of that programme cost the Organization more than US$ 5 million biennially, which was more than certain States paid in contributions to the regular budget of the Organization. The Israeli-Arab conflict was the only conflict in the world which had a special information programme, which, moreover, stressed only one side of the conflict.

64. It was legitimate to ask how rational such a wasteful policy was at a time when there were no funds to tell other, more pressing, stories. He invited delegations to consider whether it was right that one topic should overshadow all others and whether such a policy might not have potentially tragic implications.

65. **Mr. López** (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that actions directed against Cuba by the United States constituted acts of aggression which were in violation of international law. The Cuban people were educated and literate, with a deep culture, who had access to international media, including United Nations broadcasts. They did not need to be fed disinformation by the United States. Cuba had always told the truth to its people and to the international community, including about the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency.

66. He was not attempting to politicize the meetings of the Committee but was simply trying to denounce what was truly an act of aggression. The so-called prisoners of conscience were mercenaries who had been convicted, not for their ideas, but because they had violated Cuban law and were in the service of a foreign Power.

*Draft resolution A: Information in the service of humanity* (A/59/21, chap. IV, para. 53)

*Draft resolution B: United Nations public information policies and activities* (A/59/21, chap. IV, para. 53)

*Draft decision: Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information* (A/59/21, chap. IV, para. 53)

67. **The Chairman** recalled that the Committee on Information had adopted the two draft resolutions and the draft decision by consensus. He had been informed by the Secretariat that the two draft resolutions and the draft decision had no programme budget implications. It was his understanding that there was general agreement in the Committee to take a decision on the three proposals jointly. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to take action on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision jointly.

68. *It was so decided.*

69. *Draft resolutions A and B and a draft decision, as contained in paragraph 53 of the report of the Committee on Information (A/59/21), were adopted without a vote.*

70. **The Chairman** announced that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 78.

*The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.*